

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MORES

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were correlative and coherent parts of an expanding prosperity and group life.

108. Greek pessimism. It is true that this light-hearted, gayp and artistic temper was boyish. Behind it there always was a pessimistic world philosophy. The gods envied men any happiness and success, and would cast down any one who was successful. The joyous temper always was that of the man who has made up his mind to enjoy himself and forget, since to take thought and care would do no good. This philosophy embittered all prosperity. The epic heroes suffered painful ends, and when the tragedians took up the stories again they heaped up crime and woe.¹ Pessimism was in the myths. While things went well the life policy of joyous carelessness overbore the pessimism, but when things began to go ill the conviction arose that life is not worth living. The abuses of democracy in the cities took away all the joy of success. It was wisdom just to take things as they came. Life was not worth having, for itself. If circumstances turned the balance of joy and pain so that the latter predominated a little, suicide was a rational relief. Religion did not cause this pessimism, but also it did not oppose it. Suicide was no offense to the gods, because they did not give life.² The Greeks held their doctrine of pessimism, the envy of the gods, etc., to be a correct induction from observation of life. Herodotus brought back a conviction of it from his travels.⁸ Tradition ascribed to Solon the saying that "there is not a single happy mortal to be found amongst all the sun shines on."⁴

109. Greek degeneracy. The decline of the Greeks in the three

centuries before our era is so great and sudden that it is very difficult to understand it. The best estimate of the population of the Peloponnesus in the second century B.C. puts it at one hundred and nine per square mile.⁵ Yet the population was emigrating, and population was restricted. A pair would have but one or two children. The cities were empty and the land was uncultivated.⁶

¹ Burckhardt, *Griech. Kulturgesch.*, II, 375 ff. * *Ibid.*, 395.

² *Sar.*, 391. * *E./</*, 397.
^f Beloch, *Bevölkerung d. Griech.-Rom**
Welt, 157.

⁶ Polybius, XXVII, 9, 5 ; Seeck,
Untergang d. Antiq. Wdt 325, 360.